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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: RESIDENTS OF KHOST PROVINCE WELCOME 2011 TIMING,
IF SECURITY IMPROVES

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: While the President's December 1 speech on U.S. strategy in Afghanistan registered with some GIROA officials and the media in Khost province, many residents and other government officials were not aware of it until informed by Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) representatives. Residents generally welcomed the announcement of the 2011 date to begin withdrawing troops, saying they do not want foreign forces in their country indefinitely; however, they said U.S. forces should only leave if security has improved. Some residents applauded news of a temporary increase of 30,000 troops; others believed the resources for these troops could be better spent on Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and reconstruction projects. End summary.

KHOST ACTING GOVERNOR: ANSF CAPACITY AND PRESSURE ON
PAKISTAN ARE KEY

¶2. (SBU) In a meeting on December 4, Acting Governor Tahir Khan Sabari said he viewed part of the speech on television but had not heard much comment about its content (he does not speak English). PRT representatives outlined main points of the speech and provided the Pashto language fact sheet cleared by Embassy. Sabari responded that Afghans would welcome the announced 2011 date for beginning troop withdrawal, on the condition that security and ANSF capacity improve. He said anti-government forces use U.S. troop presence as a rallying cry, thus announcing a withdrawal date removes a key propaganda point. He opined that sending more U.S. troops is not as important as upgrading ANSF capacity. Sabari stressed the importance of Pakistan as a matter of regional strategy, asserting that Pakistanis need to stop paying lip service to eliminating Afghan insurgent safe havens and guarantee they will not be allowed sanctuary in Pakistan.

LINCOLN CENTER ROUNDTABLE: 2011 DATE GOOD AS LONG AS
SECURITY ALLOWS

¶3. (SBU) The Embassy-funded Lincoln Center in Khost, which since its establishment in April 2009 has become a hub for &roshan fekr8*enlightened thinkers/educated people*convened a roundtable among seven local Afghan journalists, shura leaders, and a teacher to discuss the President's speech and the new U.S. strategy. The common theme: Afghans will welcome the proposed 2011 withdrawal date, but only if the security situation improves and ANSF capacity increases significantly. Beyond that, some participants applauded the strategy's focus on partnership with the ANSF and improving agriculture. Others decried corruption draining development dollars; some expressed doubt that the U.S. and its partners can accomplish in 18 months what they have been unable to do in eight years. Media

participants included the local BBC stringer, Azadi Radio, Khost Radio, Peace Radio, Caravan of Hope Radio, and Saba TV.

¶4. (SBU) Khost TV, the polished and pro-government local Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) affiliate, carried interviews on the speech with Khost Chamber of Commerce head Amirzai Sangeen, head of the Khost Ulema Shura Muhammad Ayoub Hashimi, director of the Khost MedioThek office (a German-backed educational center similar to the Lincoln Center) Najibullah Alukhel, and writer/analyst Amirshah Kargar. Kargar repeated an argument heard often in Khost: the staggering sum of money spent to field U.S. troops would be better spent raising ANSF salaries to a livable and competitive rate, and recruiting additional ANSF. He claimed that for the cost of sending 30,000 additional U.S. troops, the U.S. could pay to field 1.25 million ANSF, an opaque calculation that nonetheless resonates in Khost. He also pointed out that the 2011 deadline should satisfy one of the main requirements Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has set before he will join the Afghan government.

CONCERNS ABOUT CORRUPTION

¶5. (SBU) Colonel Sher Ahmad Kuchi, Khost commander of the Afghan Border Police (ABP) told PRTOFFs that, while the U.S. troop increase was all well and good, the real problem in Afghanistan is corruption within both GIROA and international organizations responsible for reconstruction. Without changing the culture of corruption, he said, people will not

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trust government regardless of security efforts underway.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Concerns about security are not new to Khost Province. However, U.S. forces are making progress improving the ANSF through combined action programs that place U.S. and Afghan forces together at every level. In addition, corruption activities are being reported and local media continue to bring instances of these activities to light. The next step in the corruption fight will be successful prosecution of a high-level case. U.S. civilians in Khost will continue to underscore to local officials the importance of escalating this fight, and seek opportunities to demonstrate U.S. commitment to addressing issues that most concern the Afghan people. End comment.
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